

59 U06 Nolan at Balaklava Part IX : "The Charge of the Light Brigade": QMG Sir Richard Airey's PRIVATE Memorandum to Lord Raglan

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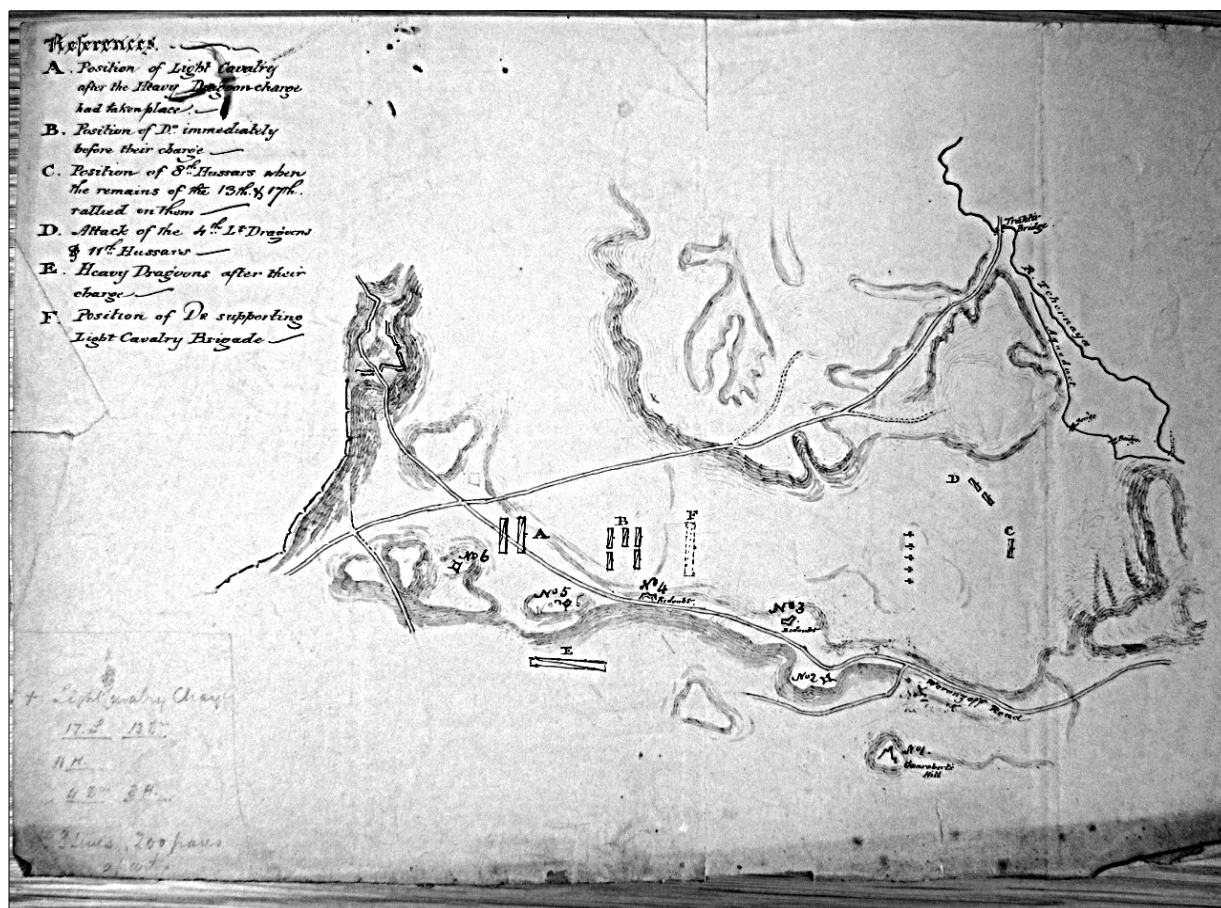
My recent article "Nolan at Balaklava Part VII" [*This Journal*, 33(2), 3-10, 2016] described the Earl of Cardigan's written responses to Lord Raglan (and others) as part of the top-level **PRIVATE** investigation of the "Charge of the Light Brigade" on 25th October, 1854. As commander of the Light Brigade, Cardigan wrote no less than three versions of an undated memorandum as his records of the event - later adding verbal descriptions directly to Queen Victoria. Rumours of the investigation - and that Captain Nolan was **NOT** judged as harshly as persistent camp rumour soon had it - were publicised shortly after by the newspaper correspondents William Howard Russell and Nicholas Woods and, more formally, in Nolan's obituary in the "*Illustrated London News*" and elsewhere. Cardigan's responses represent **Part 1** of Raglan's investigation. Following generous advice from Mike Hinton and Tony Margrave, I can now identify the response of QMG Sir Richard Airey as the missing **Part 2** of that investigation. It is certainly possible that further contributions to the investigation will come to light.

The National Archives at Kew (Box WO 28/199) contains the voluminous draft (with heavy revisions and deletions) of a history of the Field operations of the British Army in the Crimea. The principal compiler was Colonel (later Major-General) Edward Robert Wetherall (1815-1869). [*] This projected history was intended to complement the splendid 1859 volumes on the Engineer and Artillery Operations, respectively by Capt. H. C. Elphinstone, RE and Capt. W. E. M. Reilly, CB, R.A. The primary documents were used while Wetherall was DQMG in Ireland and the project was overseen by General Sir Richard Airey, the QMG at Horse Guards.

[*] *Wetherall was AQMG in the Army of the East in 1854, and in 1855 became a Colonel and was appointed aide-de-camp to the Queen. He temporarily commanded the Land Transport Corps in the winter of 1855-1856 and was the officer who misguided Lord Lucan and the Army's advanced guard during the flank march around Sevastopol on 25 September 1854.*

The Cardigan Military Papers (held in the Northamptonshire Record Office) include a letter (Item 196) from Wetherall in Dublin to Cardigan dated 15th September 1864 which states "...My manuscript of the battle of Balaklava was sent in some time since and I have no longer any control over it... I have not finished the manuscript at this stage of the work and therefore can not say there is any immediate probability of its being published..." Cardigan, clearly paranoid when his own reputation was involved, received a letter from Airey (Item 187) dated 22nd September, 1864 which reads, in part, as follows:- "Horse Guards, 22nd Sept. 1864 My dear Lord Cardigan, If you could make it convenient, at any time to call at the Horse Guards, I will with pleasure show you what has been written about Balaklava. If agreeable to you between 1 and 3 tomorrow would find me in my room; or I shall now be here till 4, when I go to India House. -....". A further letter from Wetherall (Item 197) to Cardigan dated 21st October 1864 states "...I regret I have not the power of submitting any part of my manuscript relating the occurrences in the Crimea to you. As they are completed I send them to the QMGnl [*Airey*] where they rest until the whole can be submitted to the Secy of State for War, who will decide whether the work is to be published or not...". A fourth letter (Item 189) dated 26 June 1865 - refers to Wetherall's "Volume of the History of Sevastopol" and states that is not "in contemplation to publish"... Secretary of State for War is to decide yes or no...". The project was finally terminated in the mid-1870s by HRH the Duke of Cambridge for various reasons - including the very likely strong disagreement of the Earl of Lucan.

I have transcribed all of Wetherall's draft on the battle of Balaklava and I note that Box WO 28/199 includes a remarkable and hitherto unrecognised map (belonging to Airey?) showing:-



- "References:- A. Position of Light Cavalry after the Heavy Dragoon Charge;
 B. Position of Do. immediately before their charge;
 C. Position of 8th Hussars when the remains of the 13th & 17th rallied on them;
 D. Attack of the 4th Dragoons & 11th Hussars;
 E. Heavy Dragoons after their charge.
 F. Position of Do. supporting Light Cavalry Brigade."

A pencilled addition shows:- "+ **Light Cavalry Charge**
 17.L. 13 Dn
 11H.
 4 Dn 8 H
 3 Lines, 200 Paces
 apart."

This map (drawn shortly after the Charge?) may have been used in Raglan's investigation. At least Redoubts 1, 3 and 4 were open works - from which the British 12-pounder guns could presumably be more easily withdrawn. Several other maps show Redoubts 2 and 5 also as open works. Redoubt 6 was no more than traced out on the ground. The Aqueduct, with two bridges, and the River Chernaya, with one, are named. The map's value consists in its apparently clear definition of the changing dispositions of the Light and Heavy Brigades relative to the Causeway Heights Redoubts and the Voronzoff Road.

The Light Brigade began in two lines at location **A**, athwart the Voronzoff Road and north-east of Redoubt 6. Before their advance, they moved to location **B** (north-west of Redoubt 4) as ordered by Lucan and the 11th Hussars fell back as a support line behind the 17th Lancers. From my analysis of the sight-lines from Lucan's position near Redoubt 5, he could easily monitor Russian activity on Redoubts 1, 2 and 3, but Redoubt 4 completely blocked his view of the eastern end of the North Valley - including the Russian Don No 3 Heavy Battery. After their own brilliant charge, the Heavy Brigade reformed at location **E**, south of Redoubt 5 (where they were certainly in plain sight of Lucan, John Blunt and Trumpet Major Joy). By moving slightly to the north, Lucan could overview the Light Brigade. Whatever may be said of Lucan's competence, he had clearly taken up a near-optimal position to oversee events and to command and control his forces.

Wetherall's draft history has it - "~~Lord Raglan, being under the impression that his orders for the movement of the Infantry were being carried out so~~ seeing that the Field Batteries of the 1st and 4th Divisions were engaged, ~~and~~ that the 4th Division was advancing, and seeing that the Enemy was retiring from No. 3 redoubt with the captured guns, and that the English Cavalry had not yet moved in obedience to the first order, sent a written second order to Lord Lucan in the following terms, "Lord Raglan wishes the Cavalry to advance rapidly to the front, follow the Enemy, and try to prevent the Enemy carrying away the guns, - Troop of Horse Artillery may accompany." "French Cavalry is on your left" Immediate" "Signed - R. Airey".

[From A, the Light Brigade could have passed South-East (or from B, due South) over the Causeway Heights into the South Valley between Redoubts 5 and 4, then turned East (shielded somewhat from Russian fire) towards Redoubts 3 and 2 - to intercept British guns taken from there and (further on) from Redoubt 1. N.B. The Heavy Brigade at E was well-placed to take part, but required rest after its own success. Cathcart's approaching 4th Division retook, in sequence, Redoubts 6, 5, and 4. From Redoubt 4, they opened a vigorous fire of round shot, shrapnel and shell upon Redoubt 3. In the event, the 4th Division did not advance beyond R4.]

Box WO 298/199 does not appear to include any documents related to Raglan's **PRIVATE** investigation. A second collection of mixed documents, in Box WO 298/196 (apparently set aside - as potentially embarrassing?) does contain four highly relevant items [**1-4**] - still pinned together after some 150 years - including Airey's submission.

[1] Cover note :-

Earl of Lucan to Genl. Airey. ----- Octr. 26.1854 ----- Inclosing copy of the order for the Cavalry to charge on the 25th inst.

[2] Note from Lucan to Airey :-

Balaklava Oct 26/54

Dear General Airey

I inclose a copy of the order handed to me by Captain Nolan yesterday as desired by Lord Raglan When his Lordship is enabled to give it his attention I can seriously hope that he will not still think that "I lost the Light Brigade in that unfortunate affair of yesterday

Believe me

yrs truly

Lucan

Lt Genl

The Quarter Master General

[Raglan reportedly told Lucan "You have lost the Light Brigade!" - after blaming first Airey and then Cardigan.]

[3] COPY of the 4th Order written by John Blunt, Lucan's civilian interpreter :-

Lord Raglan wishes the Cavalry to advance rapidly to the Front, follow the enemy, and try to prevent the enemy carrying away the Guns. Troop of Horse Artillery may accompany French Cavalry is on yr. left.

Immediate

Signed R Airey

[John Blunt was handed the 4th Order by Lucan and told not to follow. Blunt moved off towards Redoubt 5. He was ordered by Lucan, on 26th October, to write out three copies of the order for onward transmission. Lucan kept the original, which is now in the National Army Museum, Chelsea.]

[4] Airey's Private Memorandum :- (Q.M.G.) Private Memorandum relative to the Cavalry Charge on the 25th October 1854 Department

[On 4 foolscap pages, in Airey's handwriting.]

Private

Mem

=====

Lord Lucan received orders to advance, supported by Infantry, & take advantage of any opportunity to reoccupy the Heights which had been abandoned by the Turks. *[The 3rd Order.]*

In the meantime, the body of the Enemy were seen retiring, while a party of Cavalry were observed to dismount & tackle up the Guns from the Heights, & proceed regularly towards their own lines with them. *[*1]*

On this, another order was sent to Lord Lucan, marked "Immediate" (the first order not having been carried out ~~aetd-on~~) directing that the Cavalry was to advance to the front rapidly, and follow the Enemy - and try to prevent the Enemy from carrying away the Guns. *[The 4th Order.]*
[Marginal note] The 6lb troop of H.A. *[Horse Artillery]* might accompany & the French Cavalry were indicated, as on the left of the movement.

The two orders were in close connection with each other, - identical in spirit, & referring to the same line of operations, both on the part of the Enemy and ourselves, namely, the recovery of the Heights and Guns from the Enemy, who were retiring. *[*2]*

The word "Immediate" in the second order implying, that no time was to be lost, in following the Enemy, and obliging him, if possible, to abandon the captured Guns before they could be carried away, to some place of security. *[*3]*

Independent of the exercise of a proper discretion vested in every officer on service, according to his Rank, it would appear difficult to interpret these orders into positive directions to advance to the Attack of the Enemy after he had reformed with guns in his front & flanks, at all hazards. *[*4]*

A General officer commanding a Division, receiving written orders, should be careful in admitting that he was influenced in the execution of orders by the improper or taunting manner of an A.D.C. whom he might have placed in arrest - and certainly should not have been, then permitted to place himself in front, & lead the force. *[*5]*

[*1] Several others, including Frederick Maxse and William Howard Russell, reported the removal of guns.

[*2] This confirms the actual retirement of the Russian Troops - at least from Redoubt 3.

[*3] *The immediate urgency of the command is emphasised.*

[*4] *This confirms Lucan's right to exercise his own discretion in dealing with the 4th Order.*

[*5] *Lucan obviously reported that the written order, Nolan's status as an ADC - and his urgency - all committed him to order his Cavalry forward at once. Nolan's ill-manners would not demand his immediate arrest, particularly in a crisis situation. I have previously adduced evidence that he offered - on the Sapoune Ridge - to guide (N.B. not 'lead') the Light Brigade and he may have been authorised to do so by Raglan or Airey.*

While Airey's response to Raglan was (on the face of it) factually correct, it entirely omits any confession that he had (under Raglan's command) written out **perhaps the worst-drafted order in British military history**. As I have pointed out previously:- "...Generated under extreme pressure from Raglan, it makes so little immediate sense that I am convinced that Nolan was given supplementary instructions (cf Somerset Gough-Calthorpe) to clarify it. Very badly drafted by Airey, while not specifying an attack as such, it does not precisely define either the direction of advance or, indeed, the nationality of the guns being (or shortly to be) removed. It does not inform Lucan that he could create simultaneous advances against the Fedioukine and Causeway Heights by using the 4th Chasseurs d'Afrique. They had been ceded for the moment to Raglan by Canrobert and were at British disposal. How unfortunate that Airey did not add the the single word "English" or "British" to the order, that Nolan did not press supplementary instructions on Lucan and that Lucan did not demand instant clarification from Nolan!"

How ironic that Airey was one of the principal contributors to Nolan's memorial plaque which included:- ("...A SLIGHT TRIBUTE OF THEIR ESTEEM AND AFFECTIONATE REGARD, FOR THE MEMORY OF ONE OF THE MOST GALLANT, INTELLIGENT, AND ENERGETIC OFFICERS IN HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE...") in Holy Trinity Church, Maidstone, in early 1855! That plaque was stolen from the vandalised building in 1996 but has since been replaced by a handsome public monument nearby.

In his own defence, Lucan wrote to Raglan on 30th November, 1854. The following extracts from his letter (<http://cwrs.russianwar.co.uk/cwrs-crimtexts-docs-i541130a.html>) deserve comment:-

"... After carefully reading the Order, I hesitated, and urged the Uselessness of such an Attack and the Dangers attending it. The Aide-de-Camp, in a most authoritative Tone, stated that they were Lord Raglan's Orders that the cavalry should attack immediately. I asked where? and to do what? as neither Enemy nor Guns were within Sight. He replied, in a most disrespectful but significant Manner, pointing to the further End of the Valley, "There, my Lord, is your Enemy; there are your Guns." ... Having decided, against my Conviction, to make the Movement, I did all in my Power to render it as little perilous as possible. I formed the Light Brigade in Two Lines, and led to its Support Two Regiments of Heavy Cavalry, the Scots Greys and Royal Dragoons, only halting them when they had reached the Point [Map location F, north-east of Redoubt 4] from which they could protect the Retreat of the Light Cavalry, in the event of their being pursued by the Enemy, and when, having already lost many Officers and Men by the Fire from the Batteries and Fort, any further Advance would have exposed them to Destruction. [*] ... It should be remembered that the Aide-de-Camp, well-informed of the Instructions of his General, and the Object he had in view[**], after first insisting on an immediate Charge, then placed himself in front of one of the leading Squadrons, when he fell the First Victim. [***]..."

[*] *Lucan acted wisely in sending only two of his Heavy Cavalry regiments forward, preserving the remainder.*

[] *Q: How could Lucan positively assert that Nolan was "well-informed of the Instructions of his General"? I must conclude that Nolan had indeed been given "careful instructions" by both Raglan and Airey (cf Gough-Calthorpe's account) - as well as the written 4th Order. I suggest that Lucan learned of those "careful instructions" during the period 26th-30th November - hence his assertion - which is otherwise wholly inexplicable. According to John Blunt, who was present, Nolan offered NO clarification and Lucan did NOT interrogate him.***

[*] *The 4th Order specified an immediate "advance" to inhibit the removal of British guns - at least from Redoubt 3 - the furthest from the Russian line of retreat to the Chernaya. Nolan stated that Raglan verbally ordered an immediate "attack". As an ADC coming direct from the Commanding General, Nolan was entitled to demand immediate compliance with orders. It appears that Lucan, Cardigan and Airey did not place the entire blame upon him - as no more than a messenger-boy - but many others, then and since, have labelled him as the prime culprit. He was certainly criticised for ill-manners. Vastly LESS justifiably, however, Raglan also accused him of wantonly exceeding his authority, which I regard as a deliberate "scapegoating" lie directed to the Secretary of State for War.***

Not surprisingly, the arguments rumbled on during the winter - with Lucan fiercely contesting Raglan's use of the word "misconception" in his dispatch on the Battle of Balaklava. It culminated with Lucan being ordered to give up his command of the Cavalry and to return home in February, 1855. After much public and private argument in UK, he was, in set terms, refused his demands for a Court-Martial. The following letter sets the tone of the controversy:-

Airey to Hardinge 2nd April, 1855:- (<http://cwrs.russianwar.co.uk/cwrs-crimtexts-bsk-a2h.html>)

Crimea

2nd. April 1855

My dear Lord

A letter has been shown me, in which it is stated, with reference to Lord Lucan's case, "He denies the truth of Lord Raglan's assertion, that he declined to withdraw his letter, saying that the offer was never made". -

It is right that your Lordship should be in possession of all the facts of the case. -

As I had been the channel of communication with Lord Lucan, Lord Raglan, upon the receipt of his letter desired me to see him, and represent to him Lord Raglan's opinion, that he had better not revive the subject.

I was confined to my bed at this moment, so that Lord Lucan came up to see me. . - We had a long conversation, in which all the details of the operations of the Cavalry before Balaklava on the 25th. of Octbr were discussed, so well as the expression "misconception" in Lord Raglan's dispatch. - Lord Lucan insisted that the order to charge, or attack were imperative. - I brought to his mind the two orders, he had received referring to the same movement. - That the second order sent to him, "to advance rapidly to the front, follow the Enemy, and try to prevent the Enemy carrying away the Guns", was in close connexion with the one just before taken down to him by Colonel Somerset, stating "The Cavalry to advance, & take advantage of any opportunity to recover the heights. - They will be supported by Infantry which has been ordered to advance on two fronts." and which had not been acted on, by which means, we could see the Russians hooking their long traces to the Turkish Guns, with the intention of carrying them off.

It was expected that by rapidity of movement this would have been prevented. — and that by following the retiring Enemy closely, that they would have been taken at disadvantage. - but that

certainly it was very evident the orders given could not be construed into orders to attack the Enemy in position at all hazard, after the accomplishment of the very operation, it was intended to prevent.

We had a long conversation, in which we differed in opinion, but at all events I said, that Lord Raglan thought he had much better, reconsider the matter, and not forward his letter. - Her Majesty had publicly noticed the brilliant conduct of the Division of Cavalry under His Lordships command, and that his letter would not result in anything to his advantage. - in fact, that it would be far better to let the matter drop.

It was my impression, and I mentioned it, at the time, to Lord Raglan, that Lord Lucan was positively disinclined to adopt this course, altho' he did not actually say so, but he expressed a wish to see Lord Raglan which I said he could do, whenever he liked.

Some days afterwards Lord Raglan desired me to see Lord Lucan again, regarding the withdrawal of his letter. - He came again to me, I being still ill, and remained about three hours with me, arguing his case - We went over the case a dozen times - I told him Lord Raglan had no objection to forwarding his letter on his own account, - but strongly recommended him not to insist upon it. - That if Lord Raglan did forward his letter, in which he states that Lord Raglan had accused him of what was unmerited, His Lordship would accompany it with such observations as he might think fit. Lord Lucan here became exceedingly excited, - he said, he had nothing to say to that - of course Lord Raglan would say anything he liked, - he did not even want to know what he said. - and did not even expect an answer, - that he felt it a hardship, that so much time had already been allowed to pass, and all that he asked was, for his letter to be forwarded through the same channel, as Lord Raglan's report of the affair. -

I told him I thought he was wrong, and was very sorry for it, and that my only feeling in recommending him not to ask that his letter should be forwarded, was for his good as I thought it would be disadvantageous to him -

Upon this Lord Lucan became most violently angry - asked me if I intended to be his Protector, in a very sneering way, so that I was obliged to beg that our interview on this subject might terminate. -

When we met afterwards all seemed to have passed off, and we were on the same terms as formally [*formerly?*], never very intimate. -

Lord Raglan and Lord Lucan frequently met after this, on friendly terms, & rode thro' the Cavalry Camp & to Balaklava -

Believe me,

Most faithfully yrs

Richard Airey

The Viscount Hardinge G.C.B

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